Armas K. E. Holmio

Martin Luther

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FRIEND OR FOE OF THE JEWS

ARMAS K. E. HOLMIO, TH. D.

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Martin Luther

Friend or Foe of the Jews

By
Armas K. E. Holmio, Th. D.

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NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL,
DIVISION OF AMERICAN MISSIONS
327 S. LaSalle Street, Chicago 4, Illinois

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Foreword

In the interest of a correct understanding of Martin Luther's writings, it frequently becomes necessary to place a question mark over the activities of those who apply the great Reformer's teachings to present-day situations without regard for differences in historical settings. Obviously, if Luther's statements are removed from the context in which they were originally spoken and from the religious and social situations of his day which called them forth, they can be used to prove almost anything. One of the areas in which the Reformer has been repeatedly misrepresented has to do with the relationship of the Church with the Jewish people, frequent attempts being made to link him with modern anti-Semitism. Such attempts call for clarification by the Church of the Reformer's actual position.

In May, 1948, the so-called "Christian Nationalist Crusade" published a pamphlet purported to be a translation of Luther's *The Jews and Their Lies.* The interest aroused by this publication provided an opportunity for a re-statement by American Lutheranism of Martin Luther's actual attitude toward the Jews. Accordingly, the National Lutheran Council's Department for the Christian Approach to the Jewish People authorized Dr. Armas K. E. Holmio, Professor of Church History at Suomi College and Theological Seminary, Hancock, Michigan, to prepare this analysis of Luther's position, particularly in connection with the book, *The Jews and Their Lies.* The writer was well qualified for the task, having previously prepared a dissertation on the subject as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Th. D. degree. (The dissertation is now being published by the Lutheran Book Concern, Hancock, Michigan.) Dr. Holmio's presentation is objective and scholarly, and it merits the reader's most careful consideration.

Harold Floreen, Secretary,
Department for the Christian Approach
to the Jewish People.

"The Jews and Their Lies by Dr. Martin Luther"

FRAGMENTS OF LUTHER'S BOOK PUBLISHED BY THE "CHRISTIAN NATIONALIST CRUSADE"

In the year 1543, Martin Luther published a treatise in which he dealt with the Jewish question of his day. The rather belligerent title of the book was: *Von den Juden vnd jren Lügen,*[1] *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies.* He had discussed the problem of winning Israel to Christianity in other books before this, and he continued to do so even afterwards. For four hundred years these treatises, well known to all church historians and to all students of the history of sixteen-century Germany, have been in their resting places in libraries. Because the character of these treatises on the Jews is peculiar only to the period of the Reformation, later generations have taken little interest in them.

Fragments of the above-mentioned treatise appeared in English translation in May, 1948, under the title *The Jews and Their Lies by Dr. Martin Luther.* It was published by the "Christian Nationalist Crusade"; Gerald L. K. Smith, Director; St. Louis, Missouri. The price of the booklet was one dollar, going down to 20 cents a copy if 100 copies were ordered. It is advertised together with some thirty anti-Semitic booklets and pamphlets by these "Crusaders".

The introduction by the publishers gives a dramatic story of the "most sensational" character of the book, of its translators becoming "victims of intimidation", and of "a well organized plot to keep this book hidden". The publishers being "shocked and amazed at the interference" they encountered and the translators being made "victims" because of their work on this project may serve well the financial side of their enterprise, but otherwise it reminds us of the old story of the self-made martyr's crown, which, being of tin, melted when it was needed.

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[1] This is the original spelling in German.

What about the "well organized plot to keep this book hidden"? The publishers say that they "find among sincere Christian people a deep resentment over the fact the work of one as prominent as Martin Luther has been kept so scientifically and so deliberately away from the eyes of his millions of admirers". This does not correspond with the fact that *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies,* as the correct translation of its title reads, appears in all editions of Luther's complete works. Professor E. G. Schwiebert of Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio, gives the following list of editions of Luther's works in which it is printed:[1]

Wittenberger Ausgabe (1552), 5, 454 — 509.
Jena Ausgabe (1558), 8, 54 — 117.
Altenburg Ausgabe, 8, 208 — 274.
Leipzig Ausgabe, 21, 544 — 614.
Walch, 20, 2312 — 2528.
Erlangen Ausgabe, 32, 99 — 274.
Weimar Ausgabe, 53, 417 — 552.

All first-class libraries in the United States and the libraries of many theological seminaries have at least one of these editions, usualy the Weimar edition. All good biographies of Martin Luther, whether written by Lutheran, Catholic, or Reformed scholars, deal with the Jewish policies of Luther and mention his books concerning them — for example, Kolde, Köstlin, Grisar, and Mackinnon. A history of the Protestant Reformation would certainly be considered inadequate if no reference were made to this matter. If the publishers found it difficult to secure *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies,* the fault certainly was not in the American libraries.

There is no more "sensationalism" in Luther's books about the Jews than in his contemporaries' treatises about other questions of their day. It would be quite out of place to use Luther's and Erasmus' strongly worded writings against the Turks (1528 —1530) as a weapon against modern Turkey, or to quote the pamphlet of King Henry VIII against Luther (1521) as a weapon

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[1] Concordia Theological Monthly, No. 5, 1948.

against present-day Lutherans. The prophet of Wittenberg is certainly in strange company when his name appears on the list of American anti-Semitic writers of the twentieth century.

The title page and the advertisement of the present translation of Martin Luther's *The Jews and Their Lies* give the impression that it offers the whole work of Luther. The introduction also speaks of "completing" the translation and of publishing it "in the interest of accuracy". The little that is translated of Luther's book is, generally speaking, translated well and accurately; however, almost five-sixths of the original text is omitted, and in many instances these omissions are not indicated. Thus, the translation is not "complete", nor is Luther's full thought "accurately" presented. The translators fail to mention the edition they have used, whether Weimar or Erlangen.

In the Weimar edition of Luther's works, *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* takes 136 full pages. The translation by the "Christian Nationalist Crusaders" gives only 24 of these 136 pages, or a little more than one-sixth, omitting 112 pages. If the translators have used the Erlangen edition, the proportions are the same as above: of the 176 pages Luther's book occupies in this edition, only about 32 have been translated, or again less than one-fifth.

In ten instances the omissions are mentioned in the text. In several places they are marked with three dots. In one place, on page 25, these three dots represent thirteen and a half pages of Luther's text in the Weimar edition and over seventeen pages in the Erlangen edition. In 21 cases the omission is not mentioned at all, and the reader who is not in a position to compare the translation with the original text is left to believe that he is following the continuous line of thought of the Reformer. In these 33 places the translator omits from one line to 23 pages in the Weimar and to 30 pages in the Erlangen edition. In one place, on page 26, a short passage from the Bible represents 15 (Weimar) and 17½ (Erlangen) pages of Luther's original text. In a later chapter we shall examine briefly the five-sixths of the book which the "Crusaders'" translation, to use their own expression, keeps "so scientifically and so deliberately away from the eyes of millions of admirers".

Luther's original text does not have any subtitles. The transaltors have added 26 of them, derived from Luther's words, such as "Children of the Devil"; "Liars and Bloodhounds"; "Devil Possessed"; "Worse than the Heathen"; "Talmud Worse than Heathen Philosophy"; etc.

Background of the Jewish Policy of the Reformation

In order to understand Martin Luther's book *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* we have to study his other treatises on the Jews as well, together with the whole Jewish policy of the Reformation. These, however, are more easily understood after a brief survey of the gloomy history of the Jews in Medieval Europe.

The medieval history of the Jews is a tale of well-nigh ceaseless persecution and exile. The assertion of Tacitus, the Roman historian from the early second century, that the Jews were the enemies of mankind, persisted from one century to another. The hate directed against the Jews rose to its greatest fury during the period of the Crusades. As the Crusaders roamed over Europe to their various meeting places, they poured out their zeal in vengeful persecution of the Jews who, in their estimation, were enemies of the Holy Sepulchre, equal to the Mohammedans. During the First Crusade the great cities of southern Germany and northern France were the scenes of baptisms of blood. The approach of the crusading armies frightened the Jews to wholesale flight. St. Bernard and his kind raised their voices in behalf of the Jews, but the mass action of the crusaders in their treatment of the Jews leaves a dark blot on Christian history of that period.

The scene of the next serious persecution was England, where the Jewish colonies had existed since William the Conqueror. The valiant Richard Coeur de Lion protected them, but John Lackland confiscated all their property on which he could lay his hands. On July 18, 1290, King Edward I issued a decree which required the Jews to leave the country before All Saints Day. Refusal to comply with this decree was punishable by death. England's 16,000 Jews fled, most of them into Spain. France, likewise, rid herself of the Jews in the 1320's by means of similar persecution.

The ghastly years of the Black Plague (1348—1350) were especially direful for the Jews. The rumor started that Jews poisoned wells, lakes, and rivers, and that they had conspired to put an end to all Christendom by means of the Plague. (The modern counterpart of these inventions is the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion,* also sold by the "Christian Nationalist Crusade".) The ingredients of the poison-brew were said to be spiders, lizards, frogs, flesh of murdered Christian children, and the dough out of which the Sacred Host was compounded. Through the torture of some Jews in Spain an affirmation to these accusations was forced. The first massacre took place in northern Spain in the summer of 1348, and in one year the persecution spread to all the communities in Europe where Jews were found. A large number of Jewish colonies was annihilated. Where cooler-headed officials tried to prevent the raging of the rabble, their opposition was weakened by the accusation that they were being bribed by the Jews. No one stopped to ponder the fact that death raged even in places where not a single Jew lived and that where Jews were found they were no more immune to the Plague than the Christians.

The scene of the third great persecution was Spain, which was the headquarters of all the European Jews. After several minor attempts, the storm broke loose in 1492 when Ferdinand, the king of Aragon, published the decrees of expulsion. This was followed by a similar decree in Portugal in 1496. Of the 235,000 Jews in the Iberian peninsula, 20,000 were murdered; 50,000 were forcibly baptized; and 165,000 fled literally to all four corners of the world. It is estimated that some 5,000 of them even came to newly found America in the remote West. About 25,000 Jews fled, also, to Central Europe, most of them to Germany. Luther had this great Spanish persecution in mind when he said in his *Table Talks:* "The Jews are the most miserable people on earth. They are plagued everywhere, and scattered about all countries, having no certain resting place. They sit as on a wheelbarrow, without a country, people, or government".[1] It was this sudden great increase in the Jewish popula-

[1] Weimar T. R. 5,6196.

tion in the home country of the Reformation which caused the public interest in Germany to focus upon them.

The Dominican Order, which was always ready to fight all heretics and unbelievers, had waged a war of words against the Jews for over two hundred years before the great Spanish persecution. Cologne was one of the Dominican centers of Germany, and the arrival of the Jewish refugees from Spain made it one of the largest Jewish communities of Central Europe. Some kind of truce lasted until 1504 when, under the leadership of Jacob von Hochstraten, prior of the Dominican monastery in Cologne, a literary attack was launched against the Jews. Pamphlet after pamphlet was published in order to incite public opinion and the imperial government against Israel. Only in Berlin did this propaganda lead to violent consequences. In the year 1510 a man named Paul Fromm had been detained for the theft of sacramental bread from a church. Fromm accused the Jews; they had urged him on to his sacrilegious act. The great trial with its customary torture-involving examinations resulted in 38 Jews being burned to death and two being beheaded with the sword. Fromm confessed later that he had lied in order to save himself.

The same year, 1510, Humanism arose to defend the Jews. Its greatest German representative was Johann Reuchlin, "Father of Hebrew Philology". In several books and pamphlets he and other Humanists defended the right of the Jews to be allowed to live in peace, and finally convinced both the state and the church authorities of the non-Christian character of the century-long persecutions. Interest in the Jewish controversy gradually subsided before the death of Reuchlin in 1522.

In searching for reasons for the medieval persecutions of the Jews, the basic causes generally offered in literature dealing with these problems are the economic factors: the Jewish money-lending and the practice of usury. The Mosaic law, "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother" (Deut. 23:19), had found its way into Canon Law. As the Jews were not subject to the Canon Law, the restrictions thus imposed upon Christians became in practice a Jewish prerogative. According to the medieval

Scholasticism, money could not produce money. To profit through money, either by usury or by accepting other compensation, was sinful greed, if not outright robbery. The main cause which drove the Jews to money-lending was the insecurity of their existence — the ever-present threat of exile and the oft-recurring confiscation of their property, which made the owning of anything risky. Money was most easily hidden or taken away.

A greater cause of persecutions, however, was superstitious fear and religious fanaticism. The Jews were a strange people with alien customs and language. They headed the vanguard of progress in medicine; but, to the medieval mind, medicine and magic were Siamese twins. Hence, epidemics and plagues were eagerly laid to the influence of the art of the Jewish physicians. Intermingling with this superstitious fear was a powerful religious fanaticism. At Easter-tide, especially, "the Old Crime" of the Jews was brought to mind. In many places a straw "Judas" was burned during the Holy Week. But at times a straw symbol was not enough to satisfy the crowd's lust for blood. Even the mysterious synagogue recalled anew the battle waged against Jesus by the ancient Pharisees. Just as the secret rites of the early Christians had inflamed the imagination of the pagans and caused persecutions, so also did the secret rituals of the synagogue invoke groundless tales of the children of the Christians being slaughtered therein, and of the Sacred Host being defiled. Among the major sins of which the Jews were accused was that of purchasing stolen sacramental vessels; but the people overlooked the fact that commands were often issued to priests and monks against the pawning or selling of these sacred vessels of the Church.

Suspicion and hate were further aggravated by the fact that comparatively great freedom of life was granted to the Jews in Islamic countries, which at this time were deadly enemies of Christendom. The common Semitic blood and the severely monotheistic religion drew them toward the Arabs. In the Mohammedan countries the Jewish schools and universities flourished, with studies of Hebrew theology and Greek philosophy,

of medicine and alchemy. Such cultural freedom was in marked contrast to the restrictions imposed in so-called Christian nations where the Jews often were compelled to live a pariah-like existence of fear, and it tended to identify the Jews with the Mohammedans. The Mohammedans were hated; so the Jews also were hated.

The Jewish Policy of Luther Before the Reaction

It would be an error, however, to picture the attitude of all medieval Christendom toward the Jews as pure antagonism. As singular as it may seem, there was a missionary idea behind the Church's harsh treatment of them as well as of the Christian heretics. The idea that if the tribulations of mortal life have succeeded in bending the soul to submission to God and the Church, the missionary command of Christ has been carried out was an essential part of the medieval missionary theory. To be sure, peaceful mission work among the Jews, based upon the influence of personal conviction, was not unknown. There had been mission houses for this purpose in England before the expulsion of the Jews in 1290, and on the Continent it was customary to send itinerant dialecticians to the Jews in their business houses and homes to discuss the Christian religion with them.

In the Humanist, Reuchlin, the Jews had seen a Christian personality who from unselfish motive sacrificed his peaceful life on their behalf. In the Reformer, Martin Luther, they met a great churchman who not only allied himself with the liberal viewpoint of the Humanists but who also, in spite of the short-lived reaction, became the father of Protestant Jewish missions.

During the early years of the Reformation, in 1521, to be exact, Luther took the Jewish question under full consideration in his work, "The Magnificat". That Jews must not be treated in an unfriendly way was his opinion, for "who would want to become a Christian, seeing Christians behaving in such an un-Christian manner toward their fellow-men?"

His next stand in the matter was much more decisive. In 1523 he published a booklet with the title, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew,* which immediately gained a particularly wide circulation. In one year after its publication it ran into ten editions in German, and soon it was followed by two editions in Latin translation. James Mackinnon calls this work, which is the best

one of Luther's books concerning the Jewish question, "a fine monument of Luther's humanitarian spirit".

At about the time when *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* was ready to leave the printing press, in June of 1523, Luther wrote to a certain baptized Jew the following hopeful words: "But when the golden light of the gospel really arises to shine, it is to be hoped that many Jews will become seriously and truly converted, thus being snatched into the presence of Christ".[1] This is, also, the theme of those parts of the book which deal with the evangelization of the Jews. In the beginning of the treatise are Luther's famous words: "No matter how greatly we boast of ourselves, we are, nevertheless, pagans and the Jews blood kin of Christ; we are distant and strangers, they are near relatives of our Lord, his cousins and brothers."[2] "They belong to Christ before us."[3]

The following words of Luther in this treatise are a direct continuation of the struggle waged by Reuchlin against the Jew-baiters of his day: "For our fool popes, bishops, sophists and monks, those thick-skulled asses, have thus far treated the Jews in such a way, that whoever wanted to be a good Christian, could very well have become a Jew. And had I been a Jew and witnessed such blockheads and numbskulls ruling and teaching the Christian faith, I would rather have been a pig than a Christian. For they have treated the Jews like dogs, not like Christians. The only thing they have accomplished is to malign the Jews and to confiscate their property. When they have been baptized, they have not been taught how to live according to Christian doctrine, but only initiated into the power of popery and monasticism."[4]

As one reason for the writing of this book Luther gives the following statement: ". . . if that I might persuade some of the Jews to the Christian faith." In sending a copy of his book to Bernhard, the above-mentioned baptized Jew, Luther expressed the hope that he, by his example and work, would become a

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[1] Weimar Briefwechsel 3,102.
[2] Weimar 11,315.
[3] Erlangen 29,48.
[4] Weimar 11,314f.

missionary among his people. The Jews read and circulated this and other books of Luther. The Jewish historian, Otto Hauser, says that the Jews of Antwerp sent them to Spain, their former homeland, and even as far away as Palestine.

The first German ruler who undertook to apply Luther's liberal ideas to the Jews was Landgrave Philip of Hessen (1518—1567), the greatest political genius of the Reformation. A year after Luther had published his famous book, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew,* Philip issued a decree which granted Jews certain rights in his domains. Up to this time Philip's policy had been anti-Jewish, like that of most other German rulers. The example of the powerful Hessen gained followers from adjoining lands and brought about the removal of former restrictive measures. Another leading German state in which the Reformation meant a decisively new trend in Jewish policy was Brandenburg. The fanatical Catholic Elector, Joachim I, who had organized the Jewish massacres in 1510, died in 1535. His son, Joachim II Hector, joined the Reformation and retractetd his father's decrees against the Jews. His court chaplain and advisor, Johann Agricola of Eisleben, the reformer of Brandenburg, set himself wholeheartedly to upholding Joachim's Jewish policies and protecting the Jews against their enemies.

Meanwhile, the friendly attitude of Luther had continued. He had written in 1523: "I hope that many Jews may become ardent Christians when they are treated kindly and are guided gently on the basis of the Holy Scripture".[1] For twenty years the Reformer seems to have followed this principle in his dealings with the Jews. In his famous *Table Talks* he several times mentions his conversations with the rabbis. It is evident that in these conversations many theological problems which were stumbling blocks for the Jews were discussed, such as the Trinity, "the Suffering Servant of the Lord", the "sceptre of Judah", the virgin birth of Christ, and Christ as "the end of the law". "The Jews read our books and raise objections therefrom against us", he once observed. In his later writings addressed to the Jews he gives long and detailed theological and exegetic explanations of these subjects, trying to convince them of the truth of the

[1] Weimar 11,315, 336.

Christian dogmas. The rabbis who helped him in his translation of the Old Testament familiarized him with the highly-developed Jewish theology.

Sermons to Jews were not unknown either. Kaspar Güttel of Eisleben, a converted monk, is especially mentioned as having preached the evangelical faith to the Jews. In his own sermons Luther himself some times extended a friendly hand to Israel. But his approach to the Jews took even more practical forms. He originated the idea of using converted Jews as intermediaries — we can hardly call them missionaries — in winning other Jews. His attempt to use some of them, namely, Johannes Böschenstein and Mattaeus Adrianus, as teachers of Hebrew at the University of Wittenberg failed, however. More suitable for this difficult undertaking was Antonius Margaritha, who was baptized in 1522, and who taught Hebrew in several German and Austrian universities. He published two theological books for his former brothers in faith, but, since they were primarily polemic, their influence naturally remained small.

Luther was by no means alone in these mission ideas. The famous Lutheran scholar, Sebastian Münster, professor of Hebrew and of theology at Heidelberg and Basel, started from the practical principle of the Reformation that the Bible must be given to the people in their own language. Therefore, he began to translate the New Testament into Hebrew. He succeeded in translating only a part — the complete New Testament did not appear in Hebrew until 1599 — but he did lay a lasting foundation for Jewish missions by publishing the Hebrew translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew in 1537, and of the Epistle to the Hebrews in 1557. His *Dialogue of a Christian with a Jew,* published in 1529, was used for a long time in the work of the Jewish missions.

The Reformation attempts to win over the Jews brought about even a few practical results in the form of conversions. Some mention of baptizings has been preserved in documents. In one of his *Table Talks* Luther tells of two rabbis who "renounced their error" and were baptized "in the presence of the whole University of Wittenberg". This brief mention indicates how important the matter was considered. The first form for the

baptism of Jews in the Lutheran Church, written by Egidius Mecheler and Sigismund Kirchner, dates from the year 1539. In Luther's *Table Talks* from the following year some of his instructions concerning the baptism of Jews have been preserved. The catechumen has to know the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed, and he is to confess his sins and to admit that he has need of the Saviour-Messiah who has saved him from "sin, death, and the power of the devil". The following exhortation is given immediately before the baptism: "Do not, therefore, doubt hereafter; your sins shall be forgiven to you and you shall be called a child of God and as such you shall remain through Christ Jesus, the only Son of God, as a believer in whom you have now become. God's grace be with you."[1]

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[1] For more detailed information on the Jewish policy of Luther see: Armas K. E. Holmio, *The Lutheran Reformation and the Jews.* Lutheran Book Concern, Hancock, Mich.

The Reaction, and "Concerning the Jews and Their Lies"

An evident change away from friendliness took place gradually in the attitude of the Lutheran Reformation toward the Jews. The reaction began in August of 1536 when the Elector of Saxony, John Frederick, issued a decree that Jews were to be banished from his lands. The reasons for the banishment are not further known. The opinion of the leaders of the Reformation seems to have been divided. Wolfgang Capito, for example, sided with the Jews, while Luther refused to intervene. In his letter to Rabbi Josel of Rosheim — "my good friend Josel", he calls him — Luther gave as a reason the fact that the Jews "were committing such deeds as we Christians could not countenance on their part". This was a reference to propaganda started by the Moravian Jews, who had persuaded a few Christians to believe that Christ had not yet come, that the Mosaic law was to remain in force forever, and that the Gentiles would accept it also. A few had joined the Jews and had allowed themselves to be circumcised. They were now observing Saturday instead of Sunday and called themselves "Sabbatarians". This, to Luther's mind, overstepped all bounds of moderation and required taking a firmer grip on the Jews. In 1538 he issued an open letter concerning the matter: *A letter of Dr. Martin Luther Against the Sabbatarians, to a Good Friend.* He was now lecturing on the 17th chapter of Genesis, using as source the anti-Jewish writings of Nicolaus de Lyra. In his lectures he referred to the Jews as "a godless and an arrogant race" that hated and persecuted the Gospel. At about the same time, the Jewish question began to be more prominent also in Luther's *Table Talks,* where, for the most part, it took the form of good-natured witticism.

Luther's letter, *Against the Sabbatarians,* did not go unanswered on the part of the rabbis. In their booklet the rabbis had a Jewish and a Christian character converse, with the out-

come that the Christian faith was proved false. Luther seized upon the question and undertook to write a book, an apology of Christianity against the rabbinic theology. As source material he used several works of the rabbis as well as the works of well-known anti-Jewish writers of the Catholic middle ages: Lyra, Burgo, Porchetus, and Raymund Martin. On January 17, 1543, the work was already completed, for on that date Melanchthon sent a copy of it to Landgrave Philip of Hessen. This is the "sensational" book of which the "Christian Nationalist Crusade" has translated some fragments. The title of the book gives an inkling of its polemic nature: *Von den Juden vnd jren Lügen, Concerning the Jews and Their Lies.* The second edition appeared the same spring, and a Latin translation was made by Justus Jonas before the end of the year and published the following year in Frankfurt.

The considerateness with which Luther had treated the Jews in his work, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew,* was lacking now. He had expected them to improve but they had grown worse. Their conversion seemed impossible; they boasted of being the most high-born race on earth, having descended from Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, but Christ called them "this generation of vipers"; they would act more wisely, were they to return to Jerusalem. Luther's advice on how they were to be treated was far from Christian kindliness: Let their synagogues be burnt, "for the glory of our Lord and of Christendom", so that God might see that we would not tolerate right under our noses a meeting-house in which Christ is blasphemed; let the young and vigorous Jews be put to swinging the ax and hoe, to carding and spinning, so that they may earn their bread by the sweat of their brow as has been decreed to the children of Adam.

It is to be noted, however, that Luther and his German contemporaries did not understand his injunctions in a literal sense as do the "Aryans" and other anti-Semites of our day. The greater part of the book, notwithstanding its severity, was positive, Biblical, and representing Old Testament exegetics, which preached the Messiah-question and other matters of importance

to the Jews while always aiming at Christ. It is this greater, missionary-minded part of the book which has been omitted in the translation offered by the "Christian Nationalist Crusade".

Scarcely had this book reached the booksellers before Luther was already busy writing another book for the Jews. The manuscript was ready on March 7 and came off the press on the 28th under the title *Of Schem Hamphoras and of the Kin of Christ in the First Chapter of Matthew.* Four editions of this book appeared in 1543, and the fifth appeared the following year. It was not translated into Latin. In the first part of the book Luther examines the superstitious beliefs of the Jews and in the latter half the genealogy of Christ.

In the same year there appeared the last volume of the trilogy of books for the Jews by the aged Luther: *On the Last Words of David.* A second edition appeared the same year, and a Latin translation in 1550. This book is a study of II Samuel 23: 1—7. It is an exegetic study in which attention is focused upon the doctrine of the Trinity and upon the divinity of Christ. *On the Last Words of David* differs from the two previous works in that it is restrained and matter-of-fact in style, explaining the main doctrines of Christianity to the Jewish readers in a more peaceable way than do the two earlier volumes.

The somewhat cooler attitude of Luther toward Jews continued, however, to the end. When he was on his way in January, 1546, to effect peace among the counts of Mansfield, he caught a chill. On February 1 he wrote his wife a letter in which he made light of his illness and of the Jews: "For we had to pass through a village close to Eisleben where many Jews live, and perhaps they blew upon me, for there is no doubt that at the village a strong wind blew in at the back of the carriage, penetrating through my doctor's hat, threatening to turn my brain into ice." In his sermons the day before and the day after the writing of this letter he touched upon the Jewish question. In the sermon which he preached in Eisleben on February 15 on the text of Matthew 11: 25—30 he spoke at greater length to them. The sermon contained a fervent exhortation to the Jews

to turn to the Messiah and to let themselves be baptized. They had blasphemed Christ; that was not to be tolerated, for the people of Eisleben had enough to do with their own sins; but yet, for the time being, they were to employ Christian love and supplication in behalf of the Jews. This was Luther's last sermon. Three days later he died.

Reasons For Luther's Changed Attitude

In searching for reasons for Luther's changed attitude toward the Jews, it might, perhaps, be natural to refer to the influence of the example offered by the Catholic Church: that the aged Luther gradually abandoned the ideals of the young Luther and slipped back into the policy of his mother church. It is true that the Catholic world had continued its former activity against the Jews. The Diet of Augsburg promulgated laws against them in 1530, and the Catholic Elector of Brandenburg published them two years later. A general persecution of the Jews broke out in Portugal in 1531, and there were local persecutions in several Catholic cities of Germany and Austria in 1542. But, on the other hand, Pope Paul III (1534—1549) favored Jews to such an extent that it aroused opposition. In 1543, when Luther's attitude was most severe, Paul III founded a mission house in Rome for the Jewish converts. Thus, the contemporary example set by the Catholic Church does not suffice to explain Luther's changed attitude.

Perhaps he had some personal motives? There were at one time rumors afloat that the Jews intended to poison him. Because of these rumors a Jewish physician was imprisoned in 1525, but Luther himself was instrumental in setting him free. There were some other unpleasant but minor experiences also. However, it would certainly have been against Luther's honest and generous nature to punish the whole nation because of these experiences. The same must be said concerning the idea that his change of attitude may have been a matter of calculated expediency in church policy: in short, that Luther sought the favor of all, even of the Humanists and the Jews at the beginning of the Reformation, only to turn, when his own position was assured, against those who did not join him at the start of the battle. When he who has fought against a tyrant conquers, he himself becomes a tyrant. But Luther was not of this ilk. On the contrary, it can be reckoned as a fault against him that his

lack of political vision sometimes meant defeat for the cause of Reformation.

Another explanation exists in Luther's character. He was a deeply religious personality who always sought to evaluate matters in the light of the Bible according to the way in which its Word had enlightened him in specific instances. Because of that and because of his fluctuating nature he could quickly change his mind concerning some matter. The best example of this is his change of attitude in the Peasant War. Something of the same kind occurred with regard to his attitude toward the Jews, although the change of opinion was not nearly so sharp.

In Luther's estimation, a new situation had really arisen in the Jewish problem. He had hoped, and even believed, that the Jews would lend an ear to the Gospel. Jesus had been "born a Jew", and now that He had come to the forefront once more, through the Reformation, appearing from beneath the chaff of human doctrines, there really seemed to be cause to believe that His own tribe would receive Him. With that in mind, and in order to help the Jews to emerge from darkness into light, Luther wrote his book, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew.* But his bright hopes turned out to be premature, for, to the Jews, the Reformation was, after all, a struggle among the Christians themselves and did not greatly interest them. The great majority of them remained as distant from the Evangelical Church as they had been from the Church of Rome. Furthermore, the staunchness of the faith of converts was sometimes questionable.

Luther knew that the rabbis were responsible for the resistance of their people to the Gospel, and for the apostasy of the converts. As has been stated earlier in the discussion of the origin of the pamphlet, *Against the Sabbatarians,* the zeal of the rabbis could reach such stages in certain isolated cases that they enticed Christians away from their faith. That type of activity had always been considered an outright attack of Satan against the Church. Luther, too, pronounced harsh judgment upon it. It was this fact which caused him to change his "missionary method". From the mild and friendly call of the Gospel for all to come to Jesus, he changed it to the idea of chastisement through the Law of God as a means of bringing them to repentance. As we

have already noted, his most outspoken book on the Jews, *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies,* was written when he was highly incensed over a Jewish treatise. In this book he indeed warns Christians against the "lies of the Jews", and he even states that it is not his intention to convert the Jews. Yet, in the midst of his anger, his evangelical emphasis repeatedly comes to the surface. He yearns for the salvation of the Jews and prays for them, and the book leaves one with the feeling that Luther hopes to awaken some of them through the use of the Law.

The manifest attempt of the "Christian Nationalist Crusade" to use Luther's book as a support for modern anti-Semitism is thus a flagrant misrepresentation of the Reformer's position. Dr. Theodore G. Tappert of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pa., in writing concerning the publication of the book by anti-Semites, had this to say: "Luther's fundamental concern was not political, economic, or racial. His concern was theological." Nor is it ethical for such modern rabble-rousers to capitalize upon Luther's strong language, for the Reformer's polemics were by no means reserved for the Jews. We quote Dr. Tappert again:

"It is true that in this book Luther used violent language with reference to the Jews. The fact of the matter is that most of his polemics were seasoned with earthy and sometimes (especially for modern taste) abusive language. Princes, Luther wrote for example, 'are usually the greatest fools and the worst knaves on earth.' Peasants he called 'perjured, disobedient, rebellious murderers and blasphemers.' 'It is almost impossible for lawyers to be saved,' he wrote. Merchants he described as 'manifest thieves, robbers, and usurers.' He asserted that the pope is 'anti-Christ' and monks are 'tame dogs that lie on pillows and whistle with their hind-ends.' But for his own countrymen Luther usually reserved his sharpest words: 'I know well that we Germans are brutes and stupid beasts' and 'swilling swine.' 'We Germans are much worse than the Jews.' It would appear that, if Luther was anti-Semitic, he must also have been anti-German."

Dr. Tappert continues: "This is not to suggest that Luther is above criticism. He was given to overstatement, was not always well-informed, and shared many of the prejudices of his con-

temporaries." The final authority, after all, is not Luther, but Christ and His Word and life. The position of the Lutheran Church in this whole matter was admirably stated by Dr. Theodore Graebner in an article in *The Lutheran Witness* for April 6, 1948:

"As for the attitude of the Lutheran Church, it need hardly be said that if the charge which makes Luther an anti-Semite could be sustained, this would mean nothing at all so far as the attitude of Lutherans is concerned. Our Church is committed against anti-Semitism for the simple reason that it cannot approve, but must actively oppose by its testimony every movement based on hate."

The "Crusaders'" Translation Omits the Positive Parts of Luther's Book

It is the proofs of the truth of the Christian religion that are omitted in the fragmentary translation by the "Christian Nationalist Crusade". When Luther is chastising the Jews to penitence — and his sixteenth-century way of doing it certainly is out of harmony with modern missionary methods — his words are carefully taken out of context in the translation. In this way the false feeling is created in the reader's mind that Luther was first of all a foe and an enemy of the Jewish people. When the translators come to the arguments which Luther presents to the Jews concerning the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in Christ, they usually skip them without even mentioning the omissions. At one point in their translation they cover fifteen omitted pages of Luther's text with the statement: "Here follow many proofs from the Bible which are accompanied by detailed theological, scientific, and, therefore, in general, not understood citations, which cannot be restated here because of their volume, although they are powerful, etc." These omitted "detailed theological citations" would have made the purpose of Luther's book clearer to the reader than do the carefully screened fragments which are presented in the translation.

Our limited space allows only a brief and summary presentation of the contents of the omitted 112 pages of the Weimar edition, or the 144 pages of the Erlangen edition.

The cause of the controversy between Luther and the Jews is Christ.[1] Everything else is more or less incidental matter. Therefore, *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* becomes a peculiar apology of Christianity against Judaism. Luther proves with numerous quotations from the Old Testament, that Jesus, born of the Jews, is the promised Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the world.[2] It is the word of the Messiah which we read in Isaiah 65: 2: "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a

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[1] Erlangen 32,255.
[2] Weimar 53,450-460.

rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts," and in John 11: 25: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."[1] But Luther's Jewish contemporaries did not understand that the prophecies of the old prophets were fulfilled in the days of Herod the King[2] and that the Light, which came from the house of David, will shine not only over Judah and Israel but over the nations of the world as well.[3] The Word of God is the sole power that has spread the Gospel through the world and has made it free of the idols, but the Jews still take a stiff-necked attitude toward it.[4] As St. Paul had "great heaviness and continual sorrow" in his heart for his brethren who rejected Christ (Romans 9: 2), so have we Christians waited for 1500 years for the conversion of Israel.[5] But Luther is not without hope. He points to the "pious, converted children of Israel", who in the time of the Early Church sacrificed everything for the cause of Christ, together with the Gentile Christians.[6] The promise of God in Psalm 89: 2—5 is still in force: "For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up my throne to all generations."[7]

The scourge of Luther's many sharp words against the Jews does not hit them alone: "I do not wonder at the blindness, hardness and wickedness of the Turks nor the Jews, while I must see it in the most holy fathers of the Church, the Pope, the cardinals and the bishops."[8] The Christians are even co-sinners with the Jews: "Our sins are a hindrance that promises have not been fulfilled; therefore, we are still waiting for his promise until we have repented."[9] The misfortunes of the Jews are a warning example for the Christians, according to Romans 11: 21: "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."[10]

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[1] Weimar 53,544.
[2] Weimar 53,455.
[3] Weimar 53,465.
[4] Weimar 53,545f.
[5] Weimar 53,541.
[6] Erlangen 32,266f.
[7] Weimar 53,467.
[8] Weimar 53,449.
[9] Weimar 53,456.
[10] Erlangen 32,233.

In these omitted passages we find also the following words: "Such a new people and new Jerusalem is now the Christian Church, gathered together from the Jews and Gentiles who know that through Jesus Christ sin has been taken away, all prophecies have been fulfilled, eternal righteousness established, because he who believes in Him is righteous for ever and has his sins sealed, atoned and forgiven."[1]

Once Luther refers to the words of St. Paul in Romans 10: 1: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." In this connection Luther includes in the text of his book the following prayer, which reflects his true heart attitude toward the Jews: "O God, heavenly Father, turn and let thy wrath over them be brought to an end, for the sake of thy dear Son. Amen."[2]

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[1] Weimar 53,551; Erlangen 32,272.
[2] Weimar 53,541; Erlangen 32,259.

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